SIATRAS NUMISMATIC STUDIES, 7

Arthur J. Evans

SYRACUSAN "MEDALLIONS" *and* THEIR ENGRAVERS

The Santa Maria di Licodia Hoard

(IGCH 2123)

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Arthur J. Evans (1851-1941)

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The Santa Maria di Licodia Hoard (IGCH 2123)

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PART I
INTRODUCTION

The "medallions" of Syracuse have been the admiration of the ancient and modern world. From the 17th century onwards they have been the subject of frequent discussion on the part of numismatic writers, and the historic circumstances connected with the issue of the earliest of them, the *Damareteion*, whose name records the wife of Gelôn,[1] arrested the attention of ancient writers, who, as a rule, were little prone to afford us information about numismatic matters.

The view of the earlier numismatists that these fine coins were "medals" in the modern sense of the word, and not intended for circulation, has long been abandoned, and it has been generally recognised that they served, in fact, as current coins, of the value of fifty Sicilian silver *litras*, or ten Attic *drachmæ*. Yet, from their abnormal dimensions, the extraordinary artistic skill devoted to their production and, as will be shown in the course of this inquiry, the special circumstances under which they were originally struck, and which place them in a certain degree outside the category of ordinary coins, it does not seem inappropriate, even in the present state of our knowledge, to apply to them the name of "medallions", by which they were till lately generally known. "Medallion", in fact, in the etymological sense of the word, means simply "a large coin" and in this sense Italian numismatists often apply the name "*medaglioncini*", or "small medallions", to tetradrachms which have nevertheless always been regarded as current coins.

The Syracusan "medallions" struck towards the close of the 5th century BC have specially arrested attention, on account of the marvellous art that they display. The heads that appear upon these coins are of two main types: that of the nymph Arethusa, with her luxuriant tresses contained in a beaded net; and an even more beautiful head of the maiden goddess Persephonê; or, if that name for her

[1] For the *Damareteion*, see Part VI.

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PART II

ON A HOARD CHIEFLY CONSISTING OF SYRACUSAN DECADRACHMS, FOUND AT SANTA MARIA DI LICODIA, SICILY

In January [of 1890] a peasant digging in his plot of land at Santa Maria di Licodia, a small town that lies on one of the westernmost spurs of Ætna, found a pot containing over eighty silver coins, no less than sixty seven of which were Syracusan decadrachms or *pentêcontalitra* [later classified as IGCH 2123 hoard]. According to the account given me, the deposit lay beneath a layer of lava. The coins were at once taken into Catania, where I saw them a few days afterwards, and was thus fortunate enough not only to be able to take down a summary record of the contents of this remarkable hoard, but to secure at least temporary possession of some of the most interesting specimens. A portion of the coins, perhaps owing to the action of the lava, had suffered considerably, large parts of the surface having flaked off on one or other of their faces. There were, however, among them about a score of "medallions" in really brilliant condition, including one which from the unique type presented both by its obverse and reverse, and from the marvellous beauty and finish of its design, must take its place among the greatest masterpieces of Syracusan art that have come down to our time. The following is a brief account of the hoard.

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Decadrachms by Cimôn

1.

Obv. — Head of Arethusa, in net, in low relief (type I).
Inscription: ΣΥΡΑΚΟΣΙΩΝ.

KI
M on band of the sphendonê above the forehead.

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Figure 1. "Medallion" by New Artist.

But besides these more subtle discrepancies which reveal themselves on a minute analysis of the type before us, there are other differences in arrangement and design that must strike the most casual observer. The inscription ΣYPAKOΣIΩN, which on all other coins of this class surrounds the upper part of Persephonê's head, is here with fine artistic instinct transferred to the lower circumference of the coin, thus occupying the space reserved by Evænetus for his signature on some of his decadrachms. The field is thus set free for a new and luxuriant development of "the maiden's" curling tresses, which flow upwards and outwards, and seem "to wanton in Sicilian air", while others twine like bindweed about the curving spikes of the cornblades. Beneath and in front are the usual four dolphins which define the character of the young Earth Goddess here as Lady of Ortygia — in a wider sense, perhaps, as Lady of the Isle of Sicily — but the ampler field around has enabled the artist in this case to endow them with fuller and more graceful forms, and thus to introduce minute naturalistic details such as the double ring round the eye-socket. They are as nearly as possible one-third larger than the dolphins on Evænetus' dies,[33] and the lower of the four is placed in immediate contact with the section of Persephonê's neck, so that it seems to bear up her head.

The reverse type of this remarkable "medallion" stands equally apart from other coins of the same class. We have here, indeed, as upon the ordinary decadrachm dies, the victorious quadriga and the panoply below, but we see them in a new and grander aspect, and

[33] The average maximum breadth of the dolphins' bodies on this coin is 0.28 cm as compared with an average of about 0.19 cm on signed decadrachms of Evænetus. The average length is 1.36 cm as compared with 1.25 cm.

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Figure 9. The "Damareteion".

associated with his head on contemporary coins of Leontini.[174] That the issue of these coins connected itself with the celebration of games in Apollo's honour must be regarded therefore as unquestionable. From the great rarity of these early fifty-litra pieces we are tempted even to go a step farther, and to venture the suggestion that the coins themselves were in the first instance dedicated to the local shrine of Apollo, and that they may have served, like the Metapontine silver staters with the inscription ΑΧΕΛΟΙΟ ΑΕΘΛΟΝ, as actual prizes in a contest held in his honour.

The specially commemorative character of this first "medallion" issue at Syracuse is of first-rate importance in its relation to the revival in the years immediately succeeding the Athenian siege of a fresh issue of the same denomination. But it is easy to cite other parallels which justify us in considering that such an event as the annihilation of the Athenian *Armada* would not be left uncommemorated on the Syracusan dies. Thus, for instance, the *Pistrix* beneath the chariot on certain coins of Hierôn I, with the allusion that it conveys to Poseidon, has been reasonably taken to symbolize the great sea victory over the Etruscans off Cymê in 474 BC,[175] once more, no doubt, in connection with special hippic contests in honour of the god. The games instituted by Pyrrhus after the capture of Eryx as a tribute of devotion to Heracles, the legendary slayer of its eponymous giant, seem to have left their mark on his Syracusan bronze pieces. At a slightly earlier date the victory of Agathoclês over the Carthaginians in Africa was commemorated both in his gold and silver coinage; in

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[174] *Cf*. Head, *Historia numorum*, p. 152.

[175] Head, *Coins of Syracuse*, p. 9.

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APPENDIX A

THE HOARD OF WESTERN SICILY

[The Contessa hoard, IGCH 2119]

The remarkable hoard found in Western Sicily (at a place called Contessa) and described by Professor Salinas in the *Notizie degli scavi* for 1888,[231] has such an important bearing on our present subject as to demand some special notice, the more so as nothing more than brief references to it have appeared in any numismatic publication.

The hoard itself may be summarised as follows:

Athens

1. Tetradrachms of fine archaic style. [2 pieces]

Leucas

2. Several *Pegasi* belonging to the earliest class of Leucadian *Pegasi*.

Rhégium - Tetradrachms

3. *Obv*. — Seated Dêmos and inscription: ƧOИIƆƎЯ
   Rev. — Lion's scalp. [1]

4. *Obv*. — In later style with head of Apollo to r., resembling those signed by Cratisippus; in front ΡΗΓΙΝΟΝ; behind two leaves and berry.
   Rev. — Do.

Acragas

5. Archaic tetradrachm, worn. [1]

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[231] XX. Ripostiglio Siciliano di 101 pezzi di moneta antica di argento, etc. [In: *Notizie degli scavi di antichità, etc*. Roma 1888, pp. 295-304]. Thanks to the courtesy of Professor Salinas, I had an opportunity of inspecting these coins when at Palermo.

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Plate I. Cimôn's first "medallion" type and illustrative coins.

1 Eumenês — Euth

2 Late transitional (Syr.)

3 Evænetus (Syr.)

5 Cimôn's first "medallion" type

4 Segesta

6 Parme . . . (Syr.)

7 Syracuse

8 9 Panormus, imitated from Cimôn's type I

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f = footnote.

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IGCH 2096. See *Naxus*.
IGCH 2097 139*f*
IGCH 2123. See *Santa Maria*.
IGCH 2119. See *Contessa*.

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Editor's NOTE.

The present edition of this classical work follows the edition of 1892, mainly consisted of two parts previously published in the *Numismatic Chronicle (*1890 and 1891). Except a few minor changes silently done (most of them concerning the transliteration of the proper names and the spelling of the Greek passages) and a few additions enclosed in square brackets [ ], the following corrections should be mentioned:

Page(s)	***Initial text***	***Correction***
5		Subtitle added: *The Santa Maria di Licodia hoard (IGCH 2123)*
58 *seqq*.	Panormitis	Panormus
83		Figures 7 and 8 interchanged positions.
92 *seqq*.	Kentoripa	Centuripa
103, line 18	*Πολύζηλον*	*Πολύζαλον*
105, 109	*Αχελοιο αεθλον* (sic)	ΑΧΕΛΟΙΟ ΑΕΘΛΟΝ
129 *seqq*.		*IGCH* indications were added.
154, *f*. 271	ϵ[Ωϵ]ΩΝ	ϵ[Ωϵ**Ι**]ΩΝ
158, *f*. 291	*BMC*, 164, 155. (sic)	*BMC*, 164, 165.

Finally, an obvious mistake, the unit measurement **mill.** was corrected to **cm**: Page 31 footnote 30; p. 32 footnote 32; p. 33 footnote 33; and p. 44, lines 5, 11 and 19.

D.S.

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